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IS CONGRESSIONAL CIA WATCHDOG NEEDED?

WALTER CRONKITE: Today's report on the CIA. The Central Intelligence Agency is top dog among U. S. intelligence groups, and nowadays it's also a big name in the paperback fiction industry. Ever since its establishment after World War II, the CIA has been general whipping boy from all sides. For instance, a CIA man who wants more powers for his agency says former director Allen Dulles ran a happy ship; John McCone, he says, ran a taut ship, while the present boss, retired Admiral William Raborn, runs a sinking ship.

The public concern is more frequently expressed by those who distrust the free-wheeling activities of the agency, which operates with huge and seemingly unlimited funds. They charge the CIA acts as a king maker, even setting foreign policy--a function that's supposed to be the prerogative of the President of the United States.

Over the years, it's also been charged that the CIA promoted a right-wing revolution in Guatemala, intervened in the internal affairs of Egypt--and almost every other nation, friend, enemy and non-aligned. The Agency took a major share of the blame for the failure of the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. There have been persistent reports of conflict between the CIA and U. S. ambassadors in such important capitals as Saigon. The U. S. State Department recently denied, and then later was forced to withdraw its denial, that the CIA had offered a three million dollar bribe to the Prime Minister of Singapore, to cover up an unsuccessful CIA operation.

The French press, which sees the hand of the CIA in virtually every international scandal, is now connecting it with the kidnapping and probable murder of Ben Barka, the exiled Moroccan leader.

And now, once again, members of Congress are calling for a closer supervision of the CIA. At present, a special subcommittee from the Appropriations and Armed Services Committees of the Senate keeps informal watch over the organization.

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Senator Eugene McCarthy, of Minnesota, wants a special Foreign Relations subcommittee established to make a full and complete study of the effects of CIA operations on this country's foreign relations. Ohio's Senator Stephen Young wants a joint House-Senate committee set up on a permanent basis, to act as permanent overseer of the CIA.

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No one doubts the need for a Central Intelligence Agency in the context of our confused world today, and the cold war. And there seems to be little reason to doubt that it must operate with great discretion, in the shadows of international events, that the area of operation for the CIA is intelligence, which means collect-int and possibly evaluating information.

The organization does not have a mandate to tamper with events, and Congressional supervision may be necessary to forestall such illegal activity. If there were a decision that the Agency should operate as an undercover wing of the armed forces, and/or State Department, that decision should be made known and authorized by the Congress.